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Letter from Jerusalem

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To come to Jerusalem from Paris, or even Tel Aviv, is to succumb to the uncanny feeling that one has left the center of the West, or even its periphery, and delved into what used to be called the mysterious East.

In part this is owing to the bar of the Sonesta Hotel, where I'm staying, while attending a workshop on Maimonides and Levinas. Good martinis are hard to find in the Middle East, so I order a gin and tonic from a politely inscrutable Arab waiter, and begin to feel a bit like an official of the British Empire in India or some other colonial outpost. Hawkish by nature, I like the feeling; Jewish by the grace of God, I distrust it. My childish delight does not justify the sentiment, but my disdain for it does not render it ludicrous: Jerusalem retains traces of the British Mandate that ended in 1948. A few streets, some buildings, and at least one neighborhood, Rehavia, hold on to little hints of England. It is not all that hard to find people who remember the British rule over Palestine. One even comes across Jerusalem Jews who look back nostalgically on the years before the Jewish state existed. My father-in-law is among them.

He and other Jews assigned to the amorphous category of "observant" do far more to make Jerusalem exotic than the remnants of colonialism, or Arabs who keep their own counsel in front of Jews. They guarantee high-wire tension of a kind we Americans no longer know well. Some day there will be peace between Arabs and Jews in Israel-or so one prays and hopes. But the conflict about God among Jews will still remain, and may even flare up more strongly once Israel finds itself less endangered, less vulnerable to external threats-or so one fears.

2.

A phenomenology of the religiously exotic in Jerusalem ought to begin with the headgear of observant Jews. I am not poet enough to do justice to the theme, nor empirically gifted enough to know how many Jewish males regularly keep their heads covered, but my unscientific survey leads me to conclude that somewhat more than half (more than in the rest of Israel) wear the skull caps called *kippot* in Hebrew (known as *yarmulkes* in Yiddish)-or their equivalents. The equivalents themselves tell quite a story, ranging as they do from somber black hats to a fur contraption called a *straymel* which reminds one of the Russian nobility in wintertime or even now and then of Davy Crockett.

The wearing of skullcaps derives from Jewish tradition rather than Jewish law, to the limited extent that one can distinguish between them; it is not something that is mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the authoritative codification of Jewish law. I know a few Jews who consider themselves Orthodox but decline to wear them and are prepared to discourse learnedly on their disregard of the practice. Since no fixed and written law circumscribes the usage, one should not be surprised to learn that they come in a wide variety of materials. They are usually black and of plain cloth, but an eminent scholar I know wears one that is brightly colored and embroidered; he is trying to make the custom seem attractive to his young son. The sizes, too, vary widely, from being so small that they cannot be seen from the front, to being so big as to constitute a statement.

The ways of observant women puzzle me even more than the ways of women in general. Orthodox women are supposed to cut off their hair when they marry, but there are fewer Orthodox women who actually do this than there are men who cover their heads. Cutting off one's hair, however, is so drastic compared to the wearing of a skullcap that the "heresy" of not doing so need not be considered an act of defiance. Those who do shave their heads resort either to wigs of many colors or to shawls of many kinds. The women all dress modestly, but it is the sort of modesty that turns out to be compatible with flair and even ostentation. Each time I come to Jerusalem, all this teaches me anew that one cannot afford to confuse Orthodoxy with uniformity.

3.

The pious Jews of Jerusalem look and act alike only from the perspective of confirmed secularists. For example, it is not even true that all Hasidim wear stark black suits: some sects appear at the Western Wall (previously known as the Wailing Wall) in blue and white striped outfits.

In the Holy City, I deal mostly with Jews, but the city's other inhabitants vie with them when it comes to exotic apparel. Russian and Armenian Orthodox priests seem to have been transported from another place and time; Muslim clerics sometimes look as though they have stepped right out of a Hollywood production; and European tourists gaze reverently at antique structures from under exaggeratedly wide-brimmed hats. Orientals often appear in "native" garbs, finding Christian sites almost as strange as Jewish ones. Jerusalem is a city in which people dress up for God in astonishingly different ways. Goethe declared in connection with *Elective Affinities* that nature is everywhere the same and hinted that religion is everywhere different. Jerusalem goes him one better: here religion is different even in the same place.

4.

Here the different faiths differ among each other and the Jews differ among themselves. It shows not only in the clothes they wear but in the food they eat. By law, Jerusalem hotels serve only kosher food, except of course for the Arab hotels, so the newcomer may think that food in the city is uniform-uniformly bad. But the cuisine of Sephardic Jews, who do not (as yet) own any big hotels, is much more spicy and Mediterranean than what we think of as typically Jewish.

Nevertheless, it too is kosher. Secularists think of the enforcement of dietary laws as at least annoying and at most as an infringement of their rights. One wonders what Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger felt when, during the Gulf War, the King David Hotel here denied him his customary breakfast of bacon and eggs, but whatever he felt, he elicited the sympathy of a great number of Israeli citizens. Never mind that pork products are available in stores and meat in cream sauce is featured in many thriving restaurants away from the hotels-also shrimp, crabmeat, eel, and other tempting delicacies. The prevalence of the dietary laws does not mean that they rest on a consensus beyond discussion, if only because nothing is beyond discussion in this garrulous land. Disputes abound. The prevalence satisfies most observant Jews, and even some people like me, who approve of being surrounded by *kashruth*, of being led toward the Law, as it were, so that casually having a bite to eat entails obedience to the Torah. At the same time, it irritates most secularists, and even some observant Jews like Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who advocates a strict separation of church and state so that a pure faith may prosper. *Kashruth* in Israel generates both humorous acceptance, as when pork is called by the euphemism "white meat," and no small amount of polemics.

Thus a *kippah*-wearing government official explained to a group of visiting Americans, "If I keep kosher you can still eat at my house, but if you don't, I can't eat at yours." My friend Brenda, a staunch supporter of Israel, if not of food in Israel, reported his remarks to me derisively. Peaceable and cowardly, I did not retort that the official had made a good point. Emil J. Fackenheim, the noted theologian and a Reform rabbi, argued in similar fashion when he stated that he kept a kosher household so he could be hospitable to observant Jews. By contrast, when Fania Scholem, the widow of Gershom Scholem, is asked where she would like to dine, she is wont to reply, with a glint in her eye, "Any place that's not kosher." In Jerusalem, even meals constitute theologico-political arguments.

5.

My dear friend Marion Magid of *Commentary* magazine and I have drinks with an American couple. He too is here to attend a workshop, and they have brought along her mother and their son. Both father and son wear skullcaps. We discuss our several families and how when we come to Israel we never seem to do justice to cousins residing there. Naturally, family ties abound between American Jews and Israelis. Some tangled family relationships are typically Jewish only in folklore or in the lore of anti-Semitism: I know "Jewish mothers," for example, who are Italian Catholics. But the idea of *mishpacha*-family-still binds Jews together mightily, more than a hundred years after Nietzsche praised us for the reasonableness of our marriages. (We've learned a lot about adultery, divorce, and even odder practices since then.) Observant and secular Jews alike are likely to offer a one-word explanation for an onerous duty or faintly illicit act they undertake; the beneficiary is *mishpacha*. We no longer honor our fathers and mothers enough, but we still feel bad about our failure to do so.

6.

Families are never abstract, so let me not write about my mother-in-law but rather about *Savta* (grandmother), which is the way my children address her and what my late wife and I called her after their birth. I tell the Lichts stories about *Savta*, stories Marion has heard before but lovingly adorns; she knows *Savta*. She is a seventy-odd-year-old woman, my mother-in-law, frail and tiny almost beyond belief, but also dynamite. Fanatically Orthodox, she is nevertheless a kind of feminist, a woman who went against the grain of her surroundings and many of her own inclinations to secure a secular education for her only daughter, Shoshana, my wife-to-be. So Shoshana learned to love "white meat," left Israel for the United States, and married a Western ignoramus, me. She died of cancer a few years later, in 1973, and *Savta* has never gotten over this, partly convinced that God has punished her for abandoning her daughter to the *goyim*.

The story illustrates a dark side of ultra-Orthodoxy. *Savta* thinks that mothers of large families should not divulge the number of their children, lest an evil spirit snatch one of them away. She "knows" that a glance at a bottle of wine by a non-Jew will desecrate it, and that conversion does not suffice to make somebody really Jewish (*pace* the story of Ruth and her descendant, King David). She observes the dietary laws so scrupulously that she shudders at the very idea of eating in a restaurant.

My friend Bob, who keeps kosher himself, opposes such rigidity, and seems to oppose it more strongly than I do, for I see something charming (may God forgive me my aesthetic heresies) about unbending subservience to the yoke of the Law. His opposition reminds me, irrelevantly I think, of the way Social Democrats used to react to Stalinist abominations in my youth. Later on, however, thinking back on our conversation, and realizing yet again the intractability of the so-called "religious question" in Jerusalem, I also speculate on what seems to me the only possible resolution. It lies in the possibility that the Orthodox will learn to cope with the ultra-Orthodox. Waiting for that time to come, to be sure, may be like waiting for the Messiah-steady work.

7.

The religious scene among Jews is not simply one of unrelieved conflict, but also comprises areas of harmony, as anyone knows who has ever spent a Sabbath Eve in Jerusalem. On Friday afternoon the stores and offices empty out as the cafeas fill up. Then the cafeas empty as well, and a hush descends slowly, softly on the city, punctuated by prayer calls coming from the minarets; Muslims end their Sabbath as Jews begin their own. Buses vanish from the streets as pedestrians reappear in festive clothing. The hush deepens; it becomes holy. The air collaborates with twilight to manufacture serenity. The city rests and those who do not have intimations of God's proximity at least have a deep sense of history as they gaze at David's city in the dusk. I tell Marion that I believe Jewish history is in itself a proof of God, and here, on Sabbath Eve in Jerusalem, she, a skeptic, does not for once mock my words.

8.

Secularists and believers alike revere the Sabbath peace of Jerusalem. That peace involves the absence of public transportation, but as far as I can tell the opposition to that is not making headway year by year, even among socialists who rightly observe that the unobservant rich can take taxis while the unobservant poor must stick close to home. The Orthodox have won this fight, and I think the most intrepid atheist gets a payoff from the Saturday quiet that informs Jerusalem.

But the harmony goes only so far. Some tourists complain about the difficulty of finding a place to eat on the Sabbath, though there is always the rather charming YMCA cafea-restaurant right in the center of town. And while God rested on the seventh day, Jews keep up their quarrels. The focus of recent disputes has been the movies. In Jerusalem, they have traditionally been closed on Friday nights. This amounts to a real hardship for many, since Friday is the one night of the week not followed by a working day, and since Israelis are passionate moviegoers. They enjoy their movies even though a considerable part of the screen must be devoted to Hebrew and Arabic subtitles, as well as English ones if the film being shown is a European one.

Jerusalem used to confine that enjoyment to six evenings a week, but the secularists have successfully challenged the status quo. The Cinemateque, an art-film house, remains open on Friday nights, allegedly because its programs have "intellectual content." So if a pundit can be found to get up and speak for five minutes on, say, comedy as an important genre in American films, the audience can proceed to enjoy *Some Like It Hot*.

I love that film but I love the status quo even more. It pains the pious to have the Sabbath violated that way, and it seems to me that their pain exceeds even the pleasure to be derived from watching Marilyn Monroe. In a public meeting on the subject of "What Is a Jew?" I voice a plea that the observant and the nonobservant learn to accommodate each other. My modest proposal that the secularists come to terms with a closed Cinemateque on Friday nights draws not only hoots of derision from part of the audience but a gesture of contempt from the attending Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek.

9.

I admire Teddy Kollek. I may pray for the peace of Jerusalem, but he has labored ceaselessly to secure it. Moreover, I may talk a good game of accommodation with the ultra-Orthodox, but he must deal with their refusal to budge on almost anything. I am treated with astounding delicacy by my Israeli family, but as part of his job Kollek daily collides with ultra-Orthodox intransigence and rudeness.

I know all that, and in my small way I am evenhanded in my suggestions for compromise. I raise my feeble voice to tell ultra-Orthodox Jews I know that they simply must yield on certain issues, especially on what may be the touchiest issue of them all, deferment from military service.

The exemption of the ultra-Orthodox came about as a part of a compromise engineered by Ben-Gurion at the beginning of the state's existence. By now, it is enshrined as part of the status quo, but it goes down hard with the majority. The average Israeli's life includes "universal military service" as a matter of course, and it offends patriots of all persuasions to witness such large-scale exemptions. Opponents of Likud find them especially obnoxious.

In an Arab restaurant, I talk to a couple who are forthrightly left-wing; he is a high school teacher, and she practices psychotherapy. We exchange our different and differing opinions peaceably, but the psychologist hovers on the edge of anger when she speaks of the dread of exposing one's children to danger in the armed services while a greater percentage of Likud voters than left-wing Israelis shirk their duty. I do not know the figures but I have no reason to doubt her veracity, and I have no defense of my pious brethren to present.

10.

The charge does not render my pious brethren speechless, to be sure. Some will shrug, for they do not care about preserving the state of Israel, viewing the latter as an abomination in the sight of God since it was not ushered in by the Messiah. A few of my family's neighbors approve of Rabbi Hirsch, who went to the Madrid talks to give aid and comfort to the Palestinians and who agrees with the PLO's fulminations against the Zionist entity.

But my own family recognizes the legitimacy of the Jewish state. They may even think that their community harbors some pretenders who should be drafted because they are not truly pious. I'm not sure, because it is not a topic one can discuss openly with them, but I suspect that is how my brother-in-law Asher feels, and he is a yeshiva scholar and a most articulate man.

Asher fervently believes that the state he reluctantly acknowledges exists by virtue of God's grace and draws its strength from obedience to His law. The observant Jews of his yeshiva and kindred institutions study that Law, glorify it, explain it to the less learned, transmit it from generation unto generation. They also pray; their study *is* prayer. They beseech God to have mercy on His sinful people; they thank Him daily for keeping His covenant with that people even though that people persists in breaching *their* covenant with Him. They implore Him to stay His hand. Hence in his view they do more than armies can to preserve the state. One reads in Psalms 20 that "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will make mention of the name of the Lord our God." Asher delicately-he is most polite-points to the limits of my faith in not wishing to grant military exemptions to the ultra-Orthodox. He is right. I do trust a good deal in chariots and horses.

11.

Whenever I visit Jerusalem I spend time in Mea Shearim, the most famous ultra-Orthodox quarter. My wife's family has now moved to a somewhat "better neighborhood" (upward mobility), but Mea Shearim is still the heart's core of the "hard-core pious." It luxuriates in a myriad number of yeshivas from which comes a deafening noise of male voices in study, prayer, song. Since I look like what I am, an American Jew, I am constantly approached by black-coated men oblivious to the summer heat who force on me details of worthy causes demanding of my financial support. I wander into dingy shops and among stalls heaped with fruits and vegetables. Sallow-looking children dressed for a different climate jostle me and busy women avert their eyes from mine. Some American friends confess to me that they hate coming here because they feel revulsion and the feeling bothers them. I don't share their views, being strong on the sentiment that *kol yisrael chaverim*-all Israel are comrades. I feel as though I am surrounded by Jews, and I like the feeling.

But I cannot help noticing the slogans on the walls, in English for my benefit. In their protest against political Zionism they regularly compare Israel with Nazi Germany, and they make my skin crawl.

12.

Every summer in Jerusalem I spend at least one Sabbath with my brother-in-law's family. They live in Unsdorf, an ultra-Orthodox suburb not within walking distance of the downtown hotels, so this Sabbath visit is quite an undertaking. It means that well before sunset on Friday afternoon, I must check into the Hotel Tamir, close to where he lives, and spend the next twenty-four hours there. From sundown to sundown all the services are shut down and the telephones disconnected. Lights and air-conditioners in the rooms go on automatic pilot with the setting of the sun, and the bathrooms feature pre-torn toilet paper. On the nightstand between the single beds one finds a faceless head which I first took to be an unusually poor abstract sculpture of Queen Nefertiti. It turns out to be a place for married women to park their wigs during the night.

Oddly enough, I do not feel as out of place at the Hotel Tamir as one might think, for the simple reason that most of the guests hail from the United States and Canada, come like me to visit strictly Sabbath-observing relatives. I hear English all around me, and the expected noise of children, though the children are more somberly dressed than mine ever were. I am usually the least observant Jew in the hotel, and each year I realize anew that Orthodoxy is a leading export from North America to Israel. When I visit my relatives in Unsdorf, it is not unusual for me to be introduced to young neighbors who have emigrated from America. They like to reminisce about New York, New York, that wonderful town, but they are thinking of the Jewish enclave of Williamsburg when I am thinking of the lights of Broadway.

13.

Sabbath at my brother-in-law's house. I arrive early, so that I can still take the elevator to his spacious fifth-floor apartment. He has gone off to pray, leaving my sister-in-law to light the candles: women's work. Afterwards, I sit on the balcony savoring the short dusk, breathing air cooled by hills, playing with the younger contingent of Sarah's eight children. "Many women have more," she says when I express appreciation for her labors. Soon the males return home from their prayers.

The rituals begin. Asher dons an elegant robe and proceeds to bless his children one by one, covering the heads of his daughters who have come of age with a napkin so as to avoid direct physical contact with them.

The three-hour meal is enlivened by much singing. Only the men sing, but talking is for everyone. My mother-in-law sits next to me, subtly putting down her daughter-in-law throughout the meal. On the whole, it is a rather jolly evening. One can talk about anything one talks about at an American family dinner (at least before post-modernism hit the scene). In fact, my brother-in-law draws me out on a number of worldly themes, "honoring" me as a traveler from sinful regions. He asks as usual how Israel strikes me this year, and this year as usual I tell him how disturbed I am by the nasty things the religious and the nonreligious are saying about each other. He replies, "They are both right," and we have a good laugh about that.

Asher is reasonable in many ways, strange to say. He would never spend his Sabbath throwing rocks at cars driven by Jews, though such violence is perpetuated by people he knows, possibly by some of his friends. Like everyone else, he knows people who are more extreme than he is. I am reminded of a talk I once had with my uncle (by marriage) Shayeh of blessed memory, an extremist by almost any standard who called himself the "foreign minister" of Neturei Karta, the sect that dominates Mea Shearim. The "foreign country" he dealt with was Israel. Uncle Shayeh gave me a guided tour of the Western Wall once. I noticed a group of strange and strangely dressed Jews praying fiercely, facing the Wall but standing about fifty feet away from it. I asked him why they kept such a distance. He told me they feared that the Wall might have shifted over the years, and they did not wish to stand on what might be sacred ground. Uncle Shayeh had contempt for them and informed me that if there was anything he hated, it was a fanatic.

A silly story, yes, but it has a moral. In this tormented land the only hope for even an uneasy truce may hinge on everyone's trying to deal with and moderate his more extreme compatriot.

14.

Sabbath with my Tel Aviv friends is a different kettle of fish. The lavish meal is likely to include pork and is served on a patio. Up to twenty-five people come in the casual attire that is a trademark of secular Israel: shorts, jeans, T-shirts. (In Israel I wear a tie only when visiting my relatives.) No candles are lit, no bread is blessed, no wine is sanctified, and no holds are barred during conversation. On this particular occasion someone mentions the sequel to *Gone With the Wind*, and we wonder about the amount of sexual explicitness it contains. My relatives, I am certain, have never even heard of the original. My mother-in-law, trying to impress me once, told me that her son Asher had once read a book by Winston Churchill.

When everyone is fed and overfed, and after the inevitable political argument (my friends in Tel Aviv are all doves) the evening turns musical. The family and guests are all proficient on various instruments and they all know how to sing. Son-in-law Avner not only plays the piano but likes to mimic whole operas. Festivities go on until Yael, the woman of the house, throws everyone out.

What does all this have to do with Judaism? Sentimentally, I try to find connections: the strength of family life, the welcoming of a day of rest, and always in Israel, the ineffable Sabbath atmosphere. Sappily, I succeed in finding a hint of holiness here, and I note that even at Kibbutz Urim, where I have American friends, and where no synagogue can be found and where piety is mocked, the Sabbath meals cause me to feel that Someone or at least Something is being celebrated. And once more I think of Dostoevsky, and do not find entirely crazy his observation that there are no Jewish atheists.

15.

Sabbath at the Western Wall differs yet again. Actually, I prefer it on weekdays, when more people come to pray and fewer come to watch others pray. "People" here means mostly men; the women form a distinct minority, and are segregated from the men, confined to a small, zoned-off portion of the Wall. On those days, I put on phylacteries or let one of the pious Jews in attendance put them on me. One easily finds such volunteers, who consider it a duty and a privilege to turn bad Jews like me into better ones (though occasionally, when one is in a hurry, it can be a bit troublesome to ward off these guardians of the soul).

Wearing a prayer shawl as well as phylacteries, I kiss the Wall and pray alone, or else I join a *minyan* of nine or more fellow Jews to pray in a group. Then I agonize about what to give or refuse to the many beggars in my path, and take a cab back to the world of luxury hotels, dairy breakfasts, and the *Jerusalem Post*.

They say the Wall is never without its praying Jews; I've been there at all hours and have never been alone. But the mass crowds are confined to "special events" like Sabbaths and holidays, when the press against the Wall is so great it can be hard to find an unoccupied patch of stone to touch or kiss. On such days, the Wall is also a meeting place for relatives and fellow tourists. This past summer I struck up an acquaintance with a young Christian family from Germany, come to do penance in as unobtrusive a way as possible. I discovered their nationality only when the mother spoke in German to curb her young son's boisterousness.

On festive days, I stroll around. The top of the Wall frames a big square containing Jerusalem's two great mosques, the Dome of the Rock and *El Aksah*. At the bottom of a path leading there a sign forbids observant Jews to venture onto those forbidden grounds. I ignore it. In recent years access has been blocked by Israeli soldiers on account of the *intifada*, but last summer in Jerusalem I once was let through to walk peacefully among Muslims. The peace I found came courtesy of the soldiers and policemen everywhere in evidence. In Jerusalem, freedom to worship is secured by guns, mostly submachine guns.

16.

When I'm at the Wall, it intrigues me endlessly, and when I'm away from it, whether in Tel Aviv or East Lansing (where I write these words) it haunts me. Both Jerusalem sunlight and Jerusalem darkness-each unique-have seared my memory of it. I remember the shape and texture of the stones, the crevices between them crammed with *zettlach*, slips of paper with supplications written on them. I remember the urge to peek at those messages to Heaven, and my abiding fear of reading God's mail. Etched on my mind are the soldiers who sit on top of the Wall, and those who patrol the plaza below, most of them so very young and many of them full of innocent exuberance. I remember the caverns to the left of the Wall, where the real praying action takes place, with black-garbed men who pray fiercely interspersed with white-garbed Jews who stand rigid, their trance accentuated by tightly shut eyes. And I remember the recurring thought I have when I take a last glance backward at the Wall from the square where taxis and buses wait: I gaze at the Wall and think of Hegel, of all people, a wise man, though hardly a man enamored of Judaism. He said that the Greeks faced the sea while the Jews looked away from it into the desert, and he was right: when one stands by the Wall it is hard to imagine that the Mediterranean is less than an hour away by car. Hegel also said that Judaism was a peculiarly abstract religion and he was partly right again: the closest thing one finds to a great cathedral is a blank wall.

17.

Autumn is icumen in and the time comes to leave Jerusalem. I usually splurge on a cab to Tel Aviv. My friends Gedon and Yael live near the airport and I like to spend my last night in Israel with them.

The ride to Tel Aviv gives me a final chance to talk to a cabbie, a member of a class that acts as comic chorus for most of us tourists as well as providing us with some access to the proverbial man in the street. (My friend Marion is highly susceptible to the charm of Israeli cabdrivers, collecting their business cards and *apperus* in a sort of one-woman Harris Poll.)

My impression is that more of them vote for Likud than for Labor. But on the whole, their position is somewhere between the polar opposites I meet in Israel, between my mother-in-law, who draws on the quarrel between Jacob and Esau to analyze current events, and lovely Dalya, distinguished translator of Hebrew literature into English, who was brought up to revere Marx instead of the Bible; between my friend Joseph Ben Shlomo, whose hawkishness turns off most of my other friends, and Laami, the poet of Kibbutz Urim, for whom fascism begins just to the right of her. Some of the cabbies are surprisingly moderate, displaying the Jewish virtue of *sechel*, also known as horse sense, while others represent that significant phenomenon of all liberal democracies, the man who neither knows nor cares.

Most of them live decent and honorable lives, as do most of the people I meet in Israel. The people of Israel lives. It is easy for me to forget that in the midst of the daily spectacle of Jews at each others' throats about matters both trivial and profound, but mostly about profound matters like God, and it is easy to forget it too amidst daily reports in Israel's self-critical press of strikes and graft, silliness in the Knesset, the latest terrorist attack, and the crisis just ahead at the latest international conference. But then I think, again and again, of the Psalmist's words (118:22-23), "The stone which the builders rejected is become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." As the cab continues on its way, I tune out the driver's friendly words and look at the hills that accompany one's descent to the coastal region. It is easy for me to think of Israel as a light unto the nations when I come from Jerusalem.

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